

# SECOND CORINTHIANS

## Chapter 8

*Encouragement to Give Generously*

**We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, 2 for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, 4 begging us earnestly for the favor[b] of taking part in the relief of the saints— 5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. 6 Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. 8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. 10 And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. 11 So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. 12 For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. 13 For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness 14 your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. 15 As it is written, “Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack.”**

**8:1–9:15** Paul addresses himself to the question of the collection of money for the distressed Christians in Jerusalem, which the Corinthians had started but not completed. (CSB)

**8:1** *grace*. The “grace of giving” on the part of believers (v. 7) is more than matched by the self-giving “grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 9). (CSB)

Not the typical use of this term, but mutual generosity among Christians as a specific fruit of God’s favor, perhaps with the particular sense of thank offering. (TLSB)

*God...has been given* – didomi The following terms describe given: Deliver, grant, offer or commit. The ability and willingness to give liberally is a pure gift from God. (QV)

Liberal giving is a response to God’s grace and in fact, it is itself a gift of God (v. 7). The Holy Spirit inspires Christians not only to give spontaneously, and even more generously than their mean would appear to warrant, but to give to people they have never seen, solely because they recognize that all believers are one in Christ. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

*churches of Macedonia* – They were at Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

Paul planted Christian congregations in Europe during his second missionary journey, e.g., in Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea (cf Ac 16:12–17:13). (TLSB)

Paul wants to tell the Corinthians how extremely liberal the Macedonians have been since it was his custom to stir up one church by the example of another. (Pulpit Commentary)

Writing to the congregation in Philippi, Paul reminds them of the way they had come to his assistance after he had left Philippi: “When I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need” (Phil 4:16). Later, when Paul was a prisoner in Rome, the Philippians sent a personal representative, Epaphroditus, all the way to Rome with gifts from the church, gifts that Paul calls “a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God” (Phil 4:18). (PBC)

**8:2** *severe test of affliction* – talipsis (being burdened with anguish) of their problems brought about trials. Harsh treatment from the Romans (high taxes, high rent, and high prices for food) and a succession of civil wars had impoverished these provinces, and the persecuted Christians must have been worse off than most. Even though they were already scraping the bottom of the barrel financially, they happily responded to Paul’s appeal. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

After Paul and Silas’s rough reception in Macedonia (Ac 16:19–17:15), their converts suffered violent persecution (cf 1Th 1:6; 2:14; 2Th 1:4). (TLSB)

Acts 5:41 “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.”

Acts 16:23-25 “After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. <sup>24</sup>Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. <sup>25</sup>About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.”

*abundance of joy.* In the blessings of the gospel. (CSB)

This noun and verb are different forms of the same Gk word. The Macedonian Christians were excessive in sacrificial generosity and joyful under duress. (TLSB)

*extreme poverty.* Roman rule had earlier inflicted harsh economic repression on Macedonia, and its effects were perhaps still being felt at this time. (TLSB)

The gift of the Macedonians was like the widow’s mite. (Pulpit Commentary)

The believers in Macedonia understood what Martin Luther was to say many years later: “And take they our life, goods, fame, child and wife, let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won; the Kingdom ours remaineth (TLH 262:4).” No persecution, however severe, could rob them of the joy of salvation. (PBC)

*wealth of generosity.* There was a single-mindedness that was carried out without any hidden motives for any future pay back. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

Generous givers aren’t born that way; such an attitude is a result of being re-born. The grace, or unmerited love, of God that brings salvation to the sinner also inspires a new life of service that includes unselfish, generous giving. (PBC)

Exodus 35:22 “All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the LORD.”

Exodus 36:5 “and said to Moses, “The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done.”

Acts 6:34-35 “here were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”

**8:3** *gave...beyond their means* – *super* A superior effort that exceeded all expectations and or any sense of reality. (QV)

Often the truest generosity is displayed by those who have the least to give. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

1 Kings 17:13-15 “Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup>For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.’” <sup>15</sup>She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family.”

Luke 21:1-4 “As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “I tell you the truth,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

*of their own accord* – *autairetos*  To do so voluntarily without any outside pressure. The church at Jerusalem would probably never be able to repay them. (QV)

Genesis 13:9 “Is not the whole land before you? Let’s part company. If you go to the left, I’ll go to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left.”

Genesis 50:21 “So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.”

1 Corinthians 10:33 “even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

2 Corinthians 8:9 “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”

**8:4** *begging us earnestly* – *deomai*. To beg or pray to do so and also binding one’s self to the commitment. (QV)

In contrast with the Corinthians’ concerns about money, the Macedonians regarded assisting their destitute fellow believers in Judea as a privilege. (TLSB)

*favor of taking part* – They considered being able to participate a great opportunity and a gift from God. (QV)

The word translated “sharing” is the same word that elsewhere is translated “fellowship.” It has in it the idea of oneness, a unity, a having things in common. (PBC)

*relief of the saints* – This word could also be translated “ministry.” Christians minister to one another, they serve one another, as they give offerings to help their fellow saints, that is, believers, in their spiritual or physical needs. (PBC)

The widespread famine predicted by Agabus (Ac 11:28) hit esp hard in Judea. Hence the immediate decision to send help (Ac 11:29). The pillar apostles endorsed this plan (Gal 2:9), which Paul promoted as a major social ministry goal of his apostolate (cf Gal 2:10; Rm 15:25–26; 1Co 16:1–2). *relief*. Lit, *diakonia*, usually “ministry” or “service”; here meaning an official churchwide initiative. (TLSB)

**8:5** *they gave themselves first to the Lord*. The true principle of all Christian giving. These Macedonian Christians are an amazing example to the Corinthian believers and to the church in every age of the dynamic difference that God’s grace makes in the lives and attitudes of his people—a central theme of this letter (cf. 12:9–10). (CSB)

The core of stewardship is a complete gift of self, in body and soul, to the Lord who bought us; time, talent, and treasure follow in due course. Although Paul has a monetary offering in view, he does not directly mention “money,” “silver,” or “gold” in chs 8–9. (TLSB)

When they surrendered themselves to God they did not surrender themselves to idleness, but to activity. This could only be done by the grace of God. (Pulpit Commentary)

The result was that they were ready to follow. Their whole life was given up to the service of God. (IB)

In a few months Paul would be writing a letter to the church at Rome. In that letter, after reviewing for the Christians at Rome God’s marvelous plan of salvation, Paul says by way of application, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God” (Roman 12:1). This is precisely what the Christians in Macedonia had done. (PBC)

**8:6** *we urged Titus*.† The collection had been started in Corinth under the direction of Titus during the “previous year,” but, no doubt because of the troubles in the Corinthian church, had slowed down or come to a standstill. Paul is now sending Titus back to them, taking with him this present letter, for the purpose of completing this good work, which he describes as an “act of grace” (cf. the link between the grace of God and the selfless generosity of the Macedonian churches in vv. 1–5). (CSB)

Titus shall resume his supervision of efforts to collect funds for Judean relief, likely begun when he delivered the tearful letter mentioned in 2:4 and broken off when he left the city with encouraging news for Paul (7:6–7). (TLSB)

*act of grace*. Lit, “grace,” i.e., generous work, gift, thank offering. (TLSB)

**8:7** Paul offers the Corinthians two motives for generously participating in the relief effort: (1) imitate the Macedonians’ good example; (2) employ your resources with thankfulness for God’s rich, spiritual endowment of your own church. Cf v 9 for the third motive. (TLSB)

*you excel in everything*. Cf. 1Co 1:4–7. (CSB)

Paul's purpose here is to put the Corinthians to the test, that is, to use the zeal of the Macedonians as an occasion for the Corinthians to prove and to demonstrate the genuineness of their love for God and him. Paul is not setting up a rivalry here between the two churches. Indeed, he never mentions the quantity of the collection. Paul is concerned with the inward motive. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

To excel literally means to “overflow,” in everything, in every aspect of their new life in Christ. How positively, how evangelically Paul encourages their giving! He doesn't harangue them. He doesn't try to squeeze dead works out of their old Adam. He addresses the new man, who loves to go God's way and welcomes opportunities to express the gratitude of a reborn heart. (PBC)

**8:8** *I say this not a command.* True charity and generosity cannot be commanded. (CSB)

Since Paul's goal is a demonstration of genuine love he says, “I am not commanding you.” Just as true generosity cannot be coerced, neither can love. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

The offerings a Christian brings are a fruit of faith, the response of a grateful heart to the goodness of God. (PBC)

*earnestness of others.* The remarkable example of the Macedonian churches (vv. 1–5). (CSB)

*your love also is genuine.* They can prove this by giving selflessly and spontaneously. (CSB)

An invitation to express love within the worldwide Church. (TLSB)

**8:9** *though he was rich ... he became poor.* The eternal Son, in his incarnation and his atoning death in our place on the cross, emptied himself of his riches (see Php 2:7). (CSB)

Paul teaches that our Lord existed as God before He was conceived as man (cf Rm 8:3; Gal 4:4; Php 2:5–7). Immeasurably rich before His incarnation, Christ became the poorest of the poor as He submitted to the Law and fell victim to its curse, a process that ended in naked destitution on the cross. (TLSB)

Christ took on Himself the poverty of our sin in order that we might share in His royal treasures. He gave up divine riches during His earthly life in order that we and all who trust in Him would be made eternally wealthy. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

*through his poverty might become rich.* The supreme and inescapable incentive of all genuine Christian generosity. (CSB)

Jesus, the God-man, swapped places with sinners. He underwent the agony, desolation, and deserved punishment of fallen humankind. In return, sinners receive forgiveness and a share in His Sonship (5:21). Luther wove together these and other texts with sayings of the Church Fathers and a phrase in the medieval liturgy to produce the famous image of the “joyous exchange” (*commercium admirabile; der fröhliche Wechsel*); this involves the two-way sharing of goods in the royal marriage of Christ with the Church, His Bride. All Gospel preaching is a variation on this inexhaustible theme. Christ's squandering of His riches on poor sinners is Paul's third and greatest motive for participation in the Judean relief effort (TLSB)

The heavenly wealth that we receive by faith includes the forgiveness of sins, union with God in Christ, and everlasting life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

The Christ who became poor to make us rich is the foundation on which all Christian stewardship rests. He is Savior; He is Motivators; He is Example – and in that order. Saved by His grace, we are then motivated to follow His example, also in the area of giving. (PBC)

**8:10** *a year ago*.† Since their new year began on Sept. 21, spring is “last year” in relation to autumn of the same Roman year. (CSB)

Paul is thinking in terms of the Jewish year, beginning in Oct (not the Roman year beginning on Jan 1). May be given in the sense of “back in spring” from the perspective of this fall. (TLSB)

*this work*. The intended collection for the Judean churches. (TLSB)

**8:11** *so now finish*. The work they had started “last year” with desire (v. 10) needs to be completed (see note on v. 6). (CSB)

**8:12** Paul does not demand that the Corinthians give beyond their means but encourages them to practice generosity appropriate to their resources. (TLSB)

*according to what he does*. What matters is the willingness, which is the motive of true generosity, no matter how small the amount that can be afforded. An outstanding example of one who put this principle into practice is the poor widow (see Mk 12:41–44). The mechanics of the collection being made in Corinth had been proposed by Paul in his earlier letter (see 1Co 16:1–2). (CSB)

**8:13–14** Paul envisions voluntary redistribution of material goods among Christians to redress the imbalance between rich and poor. He presupposes that God endows the wealthy with good things so they can come to the aid of their less fortunate brethren. The tables might be turned in the future if the Judean Christians enjoy material plenty while the Corinthians suffer want. (TLSB)

**8:13** Christians are to give generously, but normally not so much that they impoverish themselves and thus require help too. Nor should almsgiving be used to encourage either laziness or luxury on the part of the recipients (2 Thess 3:10).

**8:14** One’s abundance should provide for the other’s need, and vice versa. This is the meaning of *isotas* “equality” in the text; it carries none of the political connotations that the word does in American society. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 3)

**8:15** The reference is to the gathering by the Israelites of the manna in the desert. Though in the daily gathering the aged and weak might collect less than the prescribed amount and the young and vigorous might collect more, there was an equal distribution, so that the excess of some ministered to the deficiency of others. (CSB)

Paul alludes to the gathering of manna in the wilderness to gently remind the Corinthians that their relative prosperity is not their own achievement but a pure gift of God (cf 1Co 4:7). God’s action to equalize unequal portions indicates His intent that His children enjoy sufficiency, not luxury. (TLSB)

**8:1–15** The Macedonians forgot themselves as they gave to others as though there were no tomorrow. God also calls us to give generously, because He endows us with earthly things for our neighbors’ benefit.

God's Son, the wealthiest of princes, became the most abject of slaves and gave His all to enrich poor sinners as His royal Bride. • Praise to You, Lord Jesus, for swapping places with us. Make our hearts like Yours so we may embrace Your call to aid all in need. Amen. (TLSB)

*Commendation of Titus*

**16 But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you. 17 For he not only accepted our appeal, but being himself very earnest he is going to you of his own accord. 18 With him we are sending the brother who is famous among all the churches for his preaching of the gospel. 19 And not only that, but he has been appointed by the churches to travel with us as we carry out this act of grace that is being ministered by us, for the glory of the Lord himself and to show our good will. 20 We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, 21 for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man. 22 And with them we are sending our brother whom we have often tested and found earnest in many matters, but who is now more earnest than ever because of his great confidence in you. 23 As for Titus, he is my partner and fellow worker for your benefit. And as for our brothers, they are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ. 24 So give proof before the churches of your love and of our boasting about you to these men.**

**8:16** *Titus.* † Had established a relationship of trust and affection with the Corinthians (see 7:6–7, 13–15). He had organized the collection when it was started the “previous year.” (CSB)

By going to complete the Corinthian collection (v 6), Titus gladly shared in Paul's own pastoral love for this flock. Titus's main concern is for them as sheep, not for the contributions he might fleece from them. (TLSB)

**8:18** *the brother.* Probably Luke, but possibly Barnabas. In any case, it was someone who was widely known for the faithfulness of his ministry. (CSB)

Usually identified as Luke, Paul's travel companion (see the “we” passages—Ac 16:10–17; 20:5–15; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16). However, Acts contains only two passing references to the Judean relief fund (Ac 11:29–30; 24:17), whereas we would expect more detail if Luke himself had been closely involved. (TLSB)

*the gospel.* Taken as the third Gospel (Luke) by some commentators. But the expression here does not hint at a written document (“preaching” is supplied for the sake of translation). (TLSB)

**8:19** *appointed by the churches.* Paul provides a good example of the care that church leaders should take in handling money. (CSB)

Certain churches (perhaps those of Macedonia) formally commissioned the brother of v 18 to accompany Paul as he raised the relief funds. (TLSB)

*act of grace.* The relief fund was conceived as a thank offering. (TLSB)

**8:20** It is important not only that God sees (cf. vv. 19, 21) but also that people see that one is carrying on the Lord's work in a proper, ethical and honest manner. (CSB)

Paul's overall responsibility for organizing the relief fund forms part of the discharge of his apostleship, a task delegated in Corinth to Titus. (TLSB)

**8:21** *we aim at what is honorable.* Even so, Paul is the victim of disgraceful slander; but the integrity of his representatives (see note on v. 23) reflects well on his own integrity. (CSB)

Paul and his colleagues must avoid all appearance of impropriety before both the Church and the world (including financial dishonesty); hence the stress that all Church leaders need a good reputation in the eyes of the wider community (cf 1Tm 3:7). The brother of v 18 is to audit the accounts for the collection. (TLSB)

**8:22** *our brother.* This second brother is anonymous, like the one already mentioned. (CSB)

An unknown member of Paul's inner circle, but when Titus read 2Co aloud to the assembled church, he would have identified both this brother and the brother mentioned in v 18. (TLSB)

*often tested.* Or, "proved his worth." Paul has repeatedly delegated responsibilities and perhaps sensitive tasks to this co-worker. (TLSB)

**8:23** *partner and fellow worker.* As a member of Paul's pastoral staff, Titus shares his ministry and will appear again in Corinth as his authorized representative. Titus's ministry has a wider scope than that of a presbyter (pastor) in a local church. (TLSB)

*our brothers.* The persons mentioned in vv 18 and 22. (TLSB)

*messengers of the churches.* Duly elected delegates of the churches at large (so that they could not be dismissed as cronies chosen by Paul alone). (CSB)

Lit, "apostles" in a broad sense, meaning "emissaries." The first brother will represent the churches that send them, while Titus will represent the apostle Paul. As officers responsible for stewarding the Church's earthly goods, the two brothers appear in the role of NT deacons but with responsibility going beyond the local congregation (TLSB)

*glory of Christ.* Christians of outstanding faithfulness. (CSB)

As Christ Himself is really present in all Christians, so He is really present in the two brothers (and in Titus). This truth motivates hospitality and all forms of mutual love among Christians (cf Mt 25:40). (TLSB)

**8:24** *give proof before the churches.* Because living Christianity involves not just a vertical relationship between the Lord and the individual, but also the horizontal dimension of relationships among Christians, Paul encourages the Corinthians to show the other apostolic churches how their faith is flowering in attitudes and deeds of love. (TLSB)

**8:16–24** As Paul leads a great money-gathering effort, he takes care that clergy and laity work together to ensure that the Church's financial dealings are untainted by scandal. In our churches, we should honor those who undertake such tasks. Thanks be to God for His gift of willing servants, who distribute the life-giving Gospel in all their service in Christ. • Lord, teach us to manage Your Church's earthly resources for Your glory and the advancement of Your mission. Amen. (TLSB)